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DE RUEHVL #0619 3231518
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY VILNIUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3897
INFO RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN PRIORITY 2055
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA PRIORITY 3684
RUEHTL/AMEMBASSY TALLINN PRIORITY
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW PRIORITY 3824

UNCLAS VILNIUS 000619

SIPDIS

EMBASSY COPENHAGEN FOR REGIONAL ESTH OFFICER
EMBASSY WARSAW FOR REGIONAL MEDICAL OFFICER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [PREL](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIA REPORTS FIRST FLU DEATH AS EPIDEMIC IS
DECLARED IN 12 AREAS

REF: VILNIUS 596

1. SUMMARY: A 14-year-old boy died in Kaunas of complications from H1N1 flu on November 17, giving Lithuania its first flu death of the season. Health officials also announced that cases of flu and respiratory diseases have risen dramatically in the past week. New cases have reached epidemic levels in at least 12 of the country's 60 municipalities, including Vilnius, where 43 schools have closed because of high student and staff absenteeism. The American International School of Vilnius (AISV), which many Embassy dependents attend, reported a 28 percent absence rate on November 19. At the Embassy, the maintenance staff is cleaning frequently touched surfaces with a chlorine solution and is providing hand sanitizers in every office and in common areas throughout the Embassy compound. End summary.

2. Lithuanian health officials on November 18 reported the country's first death tied to H1N1 flu after a 14-year-old boy without any reported underlying health conditions died the previous evening in a Kaunas hospital. Kaunas, Lithuania's second city, announced November 19 that flu had reached epidemic levels there. That level is defined as 100 cases per 10,000 residents.

3. Minister of Health Algis Caplikas said November 16 that the number of cases of flu and similar respiratory illnesses had risen sharply over the preceding week, and that rapid increase has continued since then. Pharmacies have repeatedly sold out of Tamiflu, face masks and other items used to ward off or treat flu, although new shipments have been arriving regularly to replenish the stocks. The GOL, which had purchased 120,000 courses of Tamiflu and Relenza, began to release its supplies to hospitals and medical clinics.

4. At least 12 of Lithuania's 60 municipalities, including the two largest cities of Vilnius and Kaunas, had declared flu epidemics by November 19. GOL health officials have asked recent medical graduates doing residencies, mostly in hospitals, to start working in polyclinics, which have experienced a massive increase in outpatient visits.

5. High absenteeism among students and staff have caused many schools to close. Media reported that 43 schools were closed in Vilnius on November 19. Nationwide, 170 schools were closed, health officials said. Officials recommended that schools consider closing if absenteeism exceeds 20 percent. The Embassy's consular staff contacted a dozen schools in Vilnius on November 18 and found absenteeism rates ranging from 15 percent to 56 percent, with an average of 42 percent. Five of those schools decided to cancel all classes for a week, while others were canceling classes just for

certain grades with high absenteeism.

¶6. At AISV, where 28 Embassy dependents are among the 190 pupils in grades pre-K-3 through 11, absenteeism on November 19 was about 28 percent. The school board chairman, who is the Naval Attache at the Embassy, said the school director was closely monitoring student and staff absenteeism and had opted to leave the school open so far because there were no spikes in absences in any grade or class. In an e-mail to parents, the director said that some of the absent students were kept home out of caution and not because they were ill, though he did urge parents to keep ill children out of school. He also reported that one pupil from the school has tested positive for H1N1.

¶7. At the Embassy, maintenance staff are now using a weak chlorine solution to clean surfaces that are frequently touched, such as doorknobs, cipher locks and countertops. The Embassy had previously distributed alcohol-based hand sanitizers to every office, and is now providing them in high-traffic common areas throughout the Embassy compound. The health unit and ESTH officer continue to monitor the flu situation in Lithuania.
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